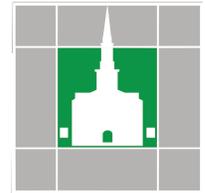


# Extremes

Scripture text: Luke 16:19-31  
The Rev. Matthew McCaffrey  
Center Church on the Green, March 14, 2021



Mackenzie Scott got married last week to a high school science teacher.



Now, before you ask, let me say you're right—you don't know who Mackenzie Scott is. And if you do, you're a bit ahead of today's message, so congratulations.

Mackenzie Scott is the daughter of a financial planner. Mackenzie attended a private school in Connecticut, and at a young age she met a young man at the firm she entered after college. They married when she was 23 and moved to Seattle. In

A screenshot of the Amazon.com homepage. It features the Amazon logo, the text "Welcome to Amazon.com Books!", and several promotional banners. The banners include: "One million titles, consistently low prices.", "(If you explore just one thing, make it our personal notification service. We think it's very cool!)", "SPOTLIGHT! -- AUGUST 16TH", "ONE MILLION TITLES", "EYES & EDITORS, A PERSONAL NOTIFICATION SERVICE", and "YOUR ACCOUNT".

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**SPOTLIGHT! -- AUGUST 16TH**  
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Like to know when that book you want comes out in paperback or when your favorite author releases a new title? Eyes, our tireless, automated search agent, will send you mail. Meanwhile, our human editors are busy previewing galleys and reading advance reviews. They can let you know when especially wonderful works are published in particular genres or subject areas. Come in, [meet Eyes](#), and have it all explained.

**YOUR ACCOUNT**  
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the mid-1990s her husband, Jeff, told her he had this idea that was consuming his thoughts. He wanted to quit the firm and start a business in their garage, selling merchandise through the Internet. Mackenzie agreed

and they both quit. Jeff settled on books, Mackenzie wrote business plans...and eventually they found themselves with a little company called “Amazon dot com.”

When Jeff Bezos and Mackenzie Scott announced their divorce in 2019, they agreed that she would receive 4 percent of



Amazon.com’s stock shares. That may not seem like much, but the \$38 billion it was worth at that time<sup>1</sup> made Mackenzie the third wealthiest woman in America. That didn’t exactly make a dent in Jeff Bezos’ fortunes either, considering that his wealth increases at a rate of nearly \$9 billion a month, or \$223,000 per minute.<sup>2</sup> He is one of those wealthy individuals who is on track to become a trillionaire some time in the next two years. He can’t spend or give his money away fast enough.

Neither can Mackenzie. But, she has a plan. She has always claimed to be a down to earth, private person who would rather be

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.scotsman.com/business/who-mackenzie-scott-net-worth-jeff-bezos-billionaire-ex-wife-and-why-she-donated-more-4bn-charity-3070262>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.scotsman.com/business/who-mackenzie-scott-net-worth-jeff-bezos-billionaire-ex-wife-and-why-she-donated-more-4bn-charity-3070262>

a writer than a famous rich person. So last summer after a series of



mysterious phone calls, Mackenzie announced that she had made 116 grants totaling over \$1.7 billion.

Unlike most philanthropic endeavors, these grants had few strings attached, and most of them were to groups led by people of

color, women, or LGBTQ persons. All she wanted to know was what their mission was, and would the money help.

Surely, it did. And Mackenzie has said that she believes income inequality has destabilized our society, and that she will give away most of what she received. She will have to work harder to do it, though. Mackenzie announced her grants on a Tuesday. Her former husband Jeff Bezos testified before Congress the next day, and the stock market liked what he had to say about Amazon. By Friday, Mackenzie's Amazon stocks had gone up so much that the income more than replaced what she had given away at the beginning of the week.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> <https://marker.medium.com/the-inside-story-of-mackenzie-scott-the-mysterious-60-billion-dollar-woman-21952a3dc811>

You and I live in a society where we are often asked to label ourselves as “poor,” “wealthy,” or somewhere in between. Most of us would place ourselves somewhere in between, no matter how relatively hindered or relatively unfettered we feel about our lives. You could say we are living in a vast middle of things, the kind of status that would make Mackenzie Scott quite envious. We’re normal—we are neither wealthy nor poor.

I might be wrong about this next idea, but I also would doubt most of you listening to this has been either crushingly, intractably impoverished or mind-bendingly wealthy in your life.

And when I say “impoverished” I’m not talking about ordinary want or need. I’m talking about your possessions being the clothes you have been able to glean from discards and your meals being whatever you can find on the street and your life literally depending on the change you can scrounge in the course of a day.

And when I say “wealthy” I’m not talking about a second home on Cape Cod or the freedom to go skiing in the winter. I’m talking about assets that place you in the company of just 1 or 2 other people in our country who own as much as the bottom half of our entire nation. And yes, Jeff Bezos is one of those three.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> <https://inequality.org/facts/wealth-inequality/#richest-americans>

I don't think anyone listening to me right now has been that impoverished or that wealthy. Our vantage point is the vast middle of things.

From our vantage point we don't really think that often or that much about what it means to be at the poor or rich end of the wealth spectrum. We presume that perhaps the very richest people are selfish, or oblivious. We presume that the very poorest people are so occupied with survival that they have no time to think about finer things, and somewhere deep we are still burdened with the idea that maybe this is punishment for something they did.

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So, thank you, Jesus! Jesus is talking about the extremes of the spectrum today. And his story is intriguing. If we want some insight into the ends of that spectrum, Jesus provides us a window into a meeting.

The rich man in Jesus' story has gotten a meeting that would have made him anyone's envy—except for the venue, of course. It's on fire, and the rich man is dead. But hey! he's actually talking with Abraham, the patriarch of Israel, the one who made a covenant with Yahweh. Too bad his five brothers can't see him now: talking with Abraham!

But there is the matter of where Abraham is, and who is on Abraham's lap. It's Lazarus, the same Lazarus who haunted the nameless rich man's doorstep every day. There he is, pestilent, pustulent Lazarus, who now appears to be Abraham's servant.

Lazarus could help! He could bring water to soothe the rich man roasting in the flames. But Abraham sets him straight: Lazarus is not anyone's servant; in God's economy Lazarus is receiving the love that was denied him in life, and the rich man's stores have been used up.

The divide between the rich man and Lazarus, safely soothed on Abraham's lap, cannot be crossed. Nor will Lazarus be sent to warn the rich man's brothers that they'd better straighten up and fly right. No, that's not going to happen.

The enormity of Abraham's refusal in Jesus' story grips us emotionally. The two men, Lazarus and the wealthy one, are revealed to us as human beings. Abraham's words are about the time that we cannot purchase, and about actions we cannot command.

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And yet it's easy to draw the wrong conclusions from this parable. We might conclude that there is nothing to be done on our part—remember, we are in the middle, and we don't live at the

extremes. The impoverished Lazarus will eventually be comforted, and the wealthy man will eventually find out what life is like without resources to throw at it.

But if you think that Jesus is letting us off the hook today, think again. The story ends with piercing words. You don't have to live on the extremes to hear a call to action in the rich man's plea and Abraham's response.

“Send Lazarus back from the dead to convince my brothers to change their ways.”

“If they won't listen to the Law of Moses and the warnings of the prophets...what makes you think they'll listen to someone who rises from the dead?”

Indeed. The question comes back from the extremes to land right in front of us. It is rooted in that pesky question: Who is our neighbor, and how are you supposed to love your neighbor?

If Jesus himself came back from the dead and asked you that question, would it change your ideas about what you can do? Because he did, and he has. And Jesus leaves us to answer the question now, while we are able to do something about it.